

4/15/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. Welcome and Introduction: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- Welcome participants on the call.
- This is the biweekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
- We are hosting this call every other week. The next call will be on Thursday, April 29th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, April 26th.
- The meeting invitations include a link to a survey we use to guide our talking points. The survey will only capture one question per response. To ask multiple questions, fill out the survey multiple times. The survey link will not change week to week.
- On today's call we will be joined by DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley, Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch, and EMS Chief Will Moran available to answer questions. We will be providing you all an overview of the State's response to COVID-19 and we will have time for additional questions at the end of the call.
- FAQs will be updated as needed and can be found at: <https://vem.vermont.gov/coronavirus>
- From this page you can also click on the "[Call Notes](#)" section on the left-hand side where we will post notes from this call. It will be added to the list of First Responder Notes.

AGENDA:

- I. Intro/call format
- II. COVID-19/VDH overview
- III. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- IV. Q&A with participants

II. COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments: HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- **Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont**
 - There is a total of 21,664 cases of COVID-19 within Vermont. This includes 176 new cases in the last 24 hours and 995 in the last week.
 - The average age for Vermonters contracting COVID-19 continues to decrease. The average age of new COVID-19 cases is 28 years old. The number of new infections among vulnerable populations is down considerably – especially among those 70 years old and older.
 - The latest 7-day average test positivity rate is 1.8%, down from 2.1% at the time of our last meeting.
 - There have been 13 COVID-related deaths in the past week.
 - 29 Vermonters are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, 4 of which are in intensive care and 0 are on ventilators.
 - There are 104 COVID-19 outbreaks in Vermont, including 4 new outbreaks in the last 24 hours. These outbreaks are spread across schools, businesses, and sectors. There is only one current outbreak in long-term care facilities, which is a large improvement from one month ago, when long-term care facilities were the most common location for outbreaks.
 - More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- **Update on variants:**
 - The B.1.1.7 (first detected in the United Kingdom) and B.1.429 (first detected in California) COVID-19 variants are circulating in Vermont. Additionally, the P.1 variant was found in a New Hampshire resident tested at a Vermont testing site, so is presumably in the state as well.
 - Nationwide, B.1.1.7 is estimated to account for around 27% of all new COVID-19 cases. This variant is more transmissible than the ordinary strain and is spreading fast.
 - Masking and social distancing still work against the variants.

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- There is concern that the P.1 and the B.1.429 variants show some resilience to vaccination. Vaccination still affords protection against these variants, just not as much. More research is needed.
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - COVID-19 testing is still a high priority. There are appointments available across the state. For information on testing [visit the Department of Health's website](#).
 - The Department of Health is ramping up testing, including the capacity to help municipalities and first response agencies schedule testing as needed.
- **Vaccination updates**
 - Vermont's goal is to have all residents fully vaccinated by July 1st.
 - On Monday, vaccination eligibility expanded to those 30 years and older. 15,000 Vermonters in this age range signed up for an appointment in the first 24 hours. For full details on registration and vaccinations visit the [Department of Health website](#).
 - About 5,000 vaccinations are being administered each day in Vermont. Last week, Vermont had one day with over 11,000 vaccinations administered.
 - Over half of Vermonters received at least one dose and about a third of all Vermonters completed vaccination. Notably, 91.6% of Vermonters 65 years and older have been vaccinated.
 - Over 6,000 Vermonters who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC) have received at least one dose of the vaccine.
 - The latest vaccination statistics are on the [Department of Health's website](#).
 - On [Tuesday, April 13th](#), following recommendations by Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration, Vermont paused administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine after six reports across the U.S. of an extremely rare reaction to the vaccine.
 - State officials announced today (April 15th), that Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine appointments have been [cancelled through Friday, April 23rd](#). Anyone who had an appointment cancelled through the state registration system should call the Department of Health at 855-722-7878. The department is working hard to open as many additional appointments as possible for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and expects everyone impacted by this pause will be able to get an appointment by the end of April.
 - An increase in the state's allocation of Pfizer vaccines is expected to offset the cancelled Johnson & Johnson allocations for this week.
- We received a question about the scientific basis for the updated travel guidance.
 - The [Vermont Forward Plan](#), including the changing travel guidance, was created with the input of Department of Health leadership and takes the epidemiology of COVID-19 into account.
 - As a greater proportion of the population becomes vaccinated, restrictions can be loosened safely.
 - We welcome local governments and other organizations to be more restrictive with travel guidance as they see fit. In other words, you can still require employees to quarantine after travel before returning to work. There's nothing wrong with being more rigorous.
 - Vermont instituted a travel quarantine policy because COVID-19 case rates were much lower in Vermont than in neighboring states. Now that viral transmission is more evenly distributed, travel quarantines are less epidemiologically useful.

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- First response agencies have been asking about how the Vermont Forward plan will interact with the state's fire/EMS non-emergency activity guidance.
 - Per the Vermont Forward Plan, on roughly May 1st all businesses will transition from sector-specific guidance to more lenient universal guidance. Gathering size restrictions will also be loosened. Both of these changes will impact fire/EMS training guidance, and the State will release new training guidance when the changes come into effect. We want to ensure we take steps carefully.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On weekends the SEOC is in monitoring status, meaning the watch officer is the point of contact for any resource needs that arise. The SEOC is entirely virtual.
- **Recent policy changes:**
 - On April 6th, the governor announced the [Vermont Forward Plan](#), which is a blueprint for methodically and safely easing mitigation measures as more Vermonters are vaccinated. The plan outlines three steps leading to July 4th, when the State expects to transition universal guidance mandates into recommendations.
 - On Friday April 9th, Step 1 of the Vermont Forward plan took effect, impacting business operations and cross-state travel.
 - [Cross-state travel:](#) No quarantine is required for unvaccinated visitors with a negative test within 3 days prior to arrival. Unvaccinated Vermonters must be tested within 3 days upon return to the state.
 - [Business Operations:](#) Low-contact, short-duration, and outdoor/closed environment businesses just need to follow the state's universal guidance, rather than sector-specific guidance.
 - [Universal Guidance](#) includes staying home if sick, wearing a mask, ensuring six-foot spaces and uncrowded places, practicing good hygiene, and thinking before you travel. For full details on Universal Guidance visit the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development website](#).
 - Step 2 of the plan is expected to begin on May 1st and will impact business operations and gatherings and events.
 - [Business Operations:](#) Longer duration or close contact businesses will move from sector-specific guidance to universal guidance.
 - [Gatherings and Events:](#) For indoor events, 1 unvaccinated person per 100 sq ft up to 150, plus any number of vaccinated people may attend. For outdoor events, the limit is 300 people, plus any number of vaccinated people.
 - Step 3 of the plan is expected to begin on June 1st and will impact cross state travel and gatherings and events.
 - [Cross-state travel:](#) No quarantine or testing requirements.

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- [Gatherings and Events](#): For indoor events, 1 unvaccinated person per 50 sq ft up to 300, plus any number of vaccinated people. For outdoor events, 900 people, plus any number of vaccinated people.
 - July 4th represents the end of Vermont Forward plan and will impact business operations, gatherings and events, and masks and physical distancing.
 - [Business Operations](#): Universal guidance encouraged (instead of mandatory) for all sectors.
 - [Gatherings and Events](#): No capacity restrictions.
 - Masks and physical distancing will become encouraged instead of mandatory.
 - We received a question on whether municipal government counts as a Group A or Group B business under the Vermont Forward Plan, and how the changing gathering guidance impacts public meetings.
 - There is guidance for meetings of public bodies in [Group B, section 13.1](#). As part of Group B, you should follow the universal guidance and [Group B Work Safe Guidance](#) until roughly May 1st. Around May 1st, Group B will move to following the [Universal Guidance](#).
 - [Vermont Leagues of Cities and Towns, Municipal Assistance Center](#) also has guidance that reflects the Vermont Forward Plan.
 - Lastly, gathering limits at in-person public meetings are part of a larger issue of how and when to validate vaccination. This is an ongoing issue and we know that towns, employers, and other organizations need more guidance on this subject. The State will work with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns on developing guidance. In the interim, consult with your organization's legal counsel on whether you can ask about one's vaccination status in a particular situation.
 - On April 6th, the governor introduced [a plan for economic recovery and revitalization](#), for the state legislature to take up. The plan proposes investing \$1 billion in federal American Recovery Plan funds for key infrastructure needs. This includes
 - \$250.5 million for broadband and wireless connectivity
 - \$249 million for housing
 - \$200 million for climate change mitigation measures
 - \$170 million for water and sewer infrastructure
 - \$143 million for further economic development and recovery
 - The proposal also includes \$17 million to cover administration and successful deployment of funds.
 - The SEOC continues to support Vermont's vaccination campaign, especially as the state's vaccine allocation increases. The SEOC is helping the Department of Health locate vaccination sites and coordinate other logistics. The SEOC is also working on disaster cost recovery and medical logistics.
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IV. Questions for Call Participants

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- ***Do you know when the Governor will end the state of emergency for Vermont?*** We have no current insight into when the state of emergency will end. There are several current measures afforded to the Governor through the legislation used to combat the pandemic. Even if the state of emergency stays in place for a few more months, that does not mean it will necessarily look the same as it does today.
- ***Have we received any further information regarding how long the vaccines are good for, and when/if a booster will be needed?*** The COVID-19 vaccines are good for at least six months. As more research is done more information will come out and we will keep you informed.
- ***Why does the travel testing requirement in the Vermont Forward Plan ask people to test within 3 days of travel, when the COVID-19 incubation period can be longer than that?*** The recommendations around quarantine (which covered the full incubation period) were useful when transmission was higher outside Vermont than inside the state. That is no longer the case – since early December less than 5% of cases have been associated with out-of-state travel. The Department of Health was closely involved in the formation of the Vermont Forward plan, and their epidemiological guidance plays a role in all of Vermont's pandemic response.
- ***I received a question from our local high school (which is an independent school) about how to access the funding that was announced last week to support Summer Academic programs. Is there any guidance on this or should we refer them back to the local supervisory union?*** We recommend reaching out to the Agency of Education to gather more information. Specific guidance is forthcoming.
- ***If we were to have a meeting and were given information regarding vaccinated people, is that information confidential or have HIPAA restrictions? Is it considered open record? Must it be maintained?*** We recommend you follow up with your attorney. The state's restart policy team is tackling the broader issue of how to differentiate vaccinated and unvaccinated people, and what constitutes protected information.